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CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICE WORKER'S PERCEPTION OF
HOW HOUSING ISSUES AFFECT THEIR DECISIONS

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Amanda Vasquez
Dorothy Ann Mokate Wilson
September 2006

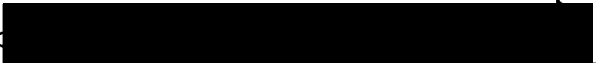
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Approved by:


Dr. Rosemary McCaslin, Faculty Supervisor
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7/12/06
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Cathy Cimbalo, Director, San Bernardino
Department of Children's Services


Dr. Rosemary McCaslin,
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ABSTRACT

Housing problems are corollaries of poverty and threats to child and family well-being, yet child welfare research has scarce history of including housing variables in analyses of case progress and case outcomes. This gap may be increasingly problematic in a developing crisis in access to adequate housing on the part of low-and middle-income families. As a result, this exploratory study looked at Child Protective Service Workers' perceptions of how housing issues affect their decisions in the removal of children from their parents, and the reunification of children with their parents. A survey examined San Bernardino County Child Protective Service Workers in the Inland Empire Region of California.

The findings of this study revealed that housing issues affected Child Protective Service Workers' decisions to reunify children with their parents more than it did the removal of children from their parents. Recommendations include the delivery of housing services in dealing with this population and the need for further study of this issue.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank Dr. Rosemary McCaslin, Faculty Supervisor, Department of Social Work, for her help and guidance in the research project

We would like to thank Chuck Bruington, Director's Assistant, San Bernardino Department of Children's Services, for his assistance in the process of gaining approval to conduct the research.

We would like to thank Cathy Cimbalo, Director, San Bernardino Department of Children's Services, for her support of the research project at her agency.

DEDICATION

To my mother, Linda, father, Ernesto, grandmother, Margaret, for their love and support in continuing my education. To my son, Freddy Jr. who is the love of my life, and his father, Freddy Sr., who without his love, support, and understanding this would not have been possible.

I am dedicating this project to my husband, Donald C. Wilson, who has supported me throughout my education, and my children, Jeremy Ladd, Jacob and Joseph Ludovico who have always seen their mother in school. To my mother, Ingeborg L. Mokate, who always supported me and gave me encouragement, and to my grandmother, Irene Mokate Heine, who showed me that life is worth the challenges. This dedication would not be complete without a special dedication to my father, Thomas G. Mokate, who always challenged me to succeed and dared me to take one class in 1979. He passed away during this program and I am sure he would be proud.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

The number of homeless families has been on the increase since the beginning of the 1980's (Buckner & Bassuk, 1999). Omang and Bonk (1999) reported that children in out of home care have doubled since the mid-1980's. The involvement of Child Protective Services (CPS) with homeless families is rising (Buckner & Bassuk, 1999; Denby & Curtis, 2003; Harburger, 2004; Omang & Bonk, 1999). Because of the increase in homeless families and the decrease in affordable housing, the removal and out of home placement of homeless children has risen (Buckner & Bassuk, 1999; Denby & Curtis, 2003; Harburger, 2004; Omang & Bonk, 1999). Denby and Curtis (2003) studied the number of children in out of home care within the United States child welfare systems. The research indicated that the number of out of home placements continues to rise.

There is a high prevalence of child welfare services involvement with homeless and low-income mothers (Culhane, Webb, Grim, Metraux, & Culhane, 2003). Nelson,

Saunders, and Landsman, (1993) found that there was a high incidence of extreme poverty among neglectful families. Inadequate housing and inadequate living arrangements for children are also significantly associated with neglect.

Child neglect according to the Welfare & Institutions Code (W&IC) is the most common form of child maltreatment and is characterized by the omission in care that results in significant harm (Gordon, Salus, Wolcott, & Kennedy, 2003). The most commonly used definition of child neglect is failure to provide for the child's basic needs including adequate food, clothing, shelter, supervision or medical care as the main components. Since neglect is the most common form of child abuse reported, it is necessary to evaluate the relationship between housing and child welfare services for neglect.

Child neglect and inadequate care of children are often intertwined with poor neighborhood and housing conditions. Subtypes of neglect include failure to provide a permanent home, housing hazards, and housing sanitation problems (Ernst, Meyer, & DePanfilis, 2004; Nelson, Saunders, & Landsman, 1993). Cohen-Schlanger and Fitzpatrick (1995) found family housing situations to be

one of the factors that resulted in temporary placement of a child into foster care, and the return home of a child was sometimes delayed due to a housing related problem.

Individuals who work in the child welfare arena such as child protective services assess neglect and maltreatment according to several risk factors, one of which is housing. The question that often arises is whether the parent can provide a stable, safe, nurturing home for their children (Buckner & Bassuk, 1999; Denby & Curtis, 2003; Harburger, 2004; Omenge & Bonk, 1999). Subsequently, another question surfaces: how does homelessness affect child protective services case management as it relates to the current and increasing housing crisis. Housing is a key risk factor that is evaluated in the assessment of families. The lack of adequate housing can lead to the removal of children from their parents and in delay of reunification children with their parents (Buckner & Bassuk, 1999; Denby & Curtis, 2003; Harburger, 2004; Omenge & Bonk, 1999). Once a family is in the child welfare system and a parent has an open case, affordable and appropriate housing becomes a

fundamental factor assessed when considering reunifying the child with the parents.

Harburger and White (2004) found that most families involved with child protective services can safely and productively care for their children with financial assistance from child welfare. However, few resources exist for child welfare to assist families with housing problems. Preserving family units becomes indicative of minimal resources. As a result, children are removed from their parents' care. An obstacle to preserving families is that funding for child welfare focuses on out of home care rather than preserving family units.

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, one has to have secure physiological and safety needs met before one can move up the hierarchy (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2001, pp. 432-433). By definition, homeless families have no permanent living arrangements and they will find themselves at motels, with friends, in shelters, or on the streets. Furthermore, their homelessness will affect their access to adequate food, clothing, supervision, education and medical care. This will stunt their climb up the hierarchy of needs.

Child Protective Service Workers must start where the client is emotionally, physically, and mentally. It is extremely difficult for a homeless family to be compliant with case plan mandates in order to keep their children or reunify with their children. The legal system has constraining timelines that often limit families' ability to meet their case plan requirements that include adequate housing. Affordable housing is a measure at the most primary level of assessment and unfortunately, it is the most difficult resource with which to assist the family.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to gain Child Protective Service Workers' perception of how housing issues affect their decisions to remove children from their parents and reunify children with their parents. This exploratory research assessed Child Protective Service Workers' perceptions by asking the workers questions about their case management and housing practices with child welfare recipients. By gaining concrete data on the reasons for removal and delays in reunifying children with parents, San Bernardino County

Child Protective Services would be able to assess the need for housing assistance programs to prevent the need for removal of children from their parents and assist families in reunifying.

The findings from this research study not only benefit child welfare departments and community agencies serving homeless families, but provide concrete information to administrators and legislators for assessing the effectiveness of current policy and the need for additional funding. The increase in children being removed from parents and the delay in reunifying children with their parents has occurred throughout the United States. Housing has been an essential variable in research, which indicates that children are remaining in out of home care longer and children are being removed from their parents because of inadequate or lack of affordable housing (Buckner & Bassuk, 1999; Denby & Curtis, 2003; Harburger, 2004; Omange & Bonk, 1999).

The present study was quantitative in design. The research method employed included a self-reporting questionnaire to Child Protective Service Workers' in order to examine a larger sample size to gain a better

understanding of their perceptions of how housing affects their decisions.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

The study provided insight into how homelessness and access to resources play an important role in assessment, the planning of services and the implementation of services within child welfare services. This research provided vital information on adjustments needed to current policy and the need for continued services.

The project provided San Bernardino County as well as legislators' information regarding the need for housing for child welfare services recipients. This study was needed because the results would potentially contribute to policy making and implementation.

This study was relevant to child welfare practice because it dealt directly with the most fundamental need for families that come into contact with Child Protective Service, appropriate affordable housing. The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) indicates that a family centered practitioner should address concrete needs including basic concerns of food, shelter, income support, and health. The court mandates tasks for clients

to accomplish within constrained timelines without considering if the most basic need for housing is being met. As a result, families remain apart or become the victims of recidivism. This study explored options and services for homeless families and the need to address homelessness immediately when assisting the families who come to the attention of child welfare.

The findings of this research affected how social workers in micro, mezzo, and macro system practice work with homeless families. On a macro practice level, it provided data on how homelessness is viewed as a factor in the removal or reunification of children to their parents.

On a mezzo practice level, this data assist in gaining funding for community and outreach programs to aid not only the worker, but also the families within the community. Last it provided the workers with an opportunity to voice their perceptions of the homeless family situation within their community. In other words, this questionnaire was utilized as a learning tool to gain valuable information about the child welfare workers' perception of housing in their community.

The research question for this project was "What is Child Protective Service Workers' perception of how housing issues affect their decisions in the removal of children from their parents, and the reunification of children to their parents?"

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature review summarizes and discusses different theoretical perspectives that shaped previous research including providing a foundation for how homelessness and affordable housing affects child protective service family reunification and family maintenance case management. This review builds on previous research from different disciplines including social work, child welfare, sociology, and urban development. It provides the different disciplines' perspectives and knowledge gained by previous research, and provides insight into how this research built on previous research.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Research has focused on several theories concerning homelessness, housing and child welfare connections. The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA, 1999-2004) has been an influential contributor to research on this topic. They have used Maslow's hierarchy of needs model to conceptualize their research (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman,

2001, pp. 432-433). CWLA's foundation for research is that basic needs such as affordable housing need to be addressed so that families can meet the mandates of the court. In addition, CWLA has inferred that macro systems theory has an impact on the interrelationship between child protective services and the housing authority. The fundamental goals of these agencies are different, but need to be allied so that families can be served appropriately (Harburger & White, 2004; Cohen, Mulroy, Tull, White, & Crowley, 2004).

Within the last three decades, scholars have examined child maltreatment from an ecological perspective. For example, CWLA's theoretical perspective is becoming more aligned to the ecosystems theory where there is more acknowledgment not just of the relationship between the macro, mezzo and micro systems, but of the need to implement policies to integrate the neighborhoods and communities in which the family lives (Malakoff-Klein, 2003).

In addition to ecosystems theory, CWLA incorporates systems theory when evaluating the barriers and responsibilities of government agencies, i.e., child protective services and housing authorities. However,

there is a gap in the literature on the specific relationship between a family's individual housing conditions and the adequacy of physical care of the child or child maltreatment.

An initial step in addressing that gap in the literature was taken by Ernst, Meyer, and DePanfilis, (2004) who explored the relationship between housing conditions and the adequacy of physical care of children. Their sample consisted of 154 caregivers (151) women and (3) men who accepted home based services over a three-year period. They examined a subset of questions on housing and neighborhood conditions and how often participants experience certain problems. They found that children who lived with caregivers who had unsafe housing conditions were less likely to receive adequate physical care. They concluded that it is important for child welfare workers to address concrete housing conditions as part of an ecological approach to preventing child neglect through both micro and macro interventions.

Legislation

Federal policy initiates government funding, policy, and implementation of practice within the child welfare,

homeless, and housing arenas. These policies have been progressive for decades (Webb & Harden, 2003). In the past decade Congress has passed several acts that have had a direct impact on how implementation of services has been directed and governed by local governments within the child welfare and housing systems. This section will evaluate the legislative acts that govern child welfare and how these acts affect child welfare practice.

Title IV-E of the Social Security Act provides the foster care program with the largest funding stream for children in foster care. In 2001, more than five billion dollars was allocated to this program and to children in out of home care. This funding stream cannot be utilized for families or children placed with their parents (Webb & Harden, 2003).

Rog, Gilbert-Mongelli, and Lundy (1998) reported that there were a series of Congressional hearings in response to the homeless situation in the late 1980s. There were legislation refinements such as the McKinny Act of 1989. Child welfare advocates and practitioners testified about the impact of the lack of affordable housing and its impact on the child welfare system. In response to these hearings, in 1990 Congress authorized

five years of funding for the Family Unification Program (FUP). The FUP would provide Section 8 vouchers for families that were at risk of having their children removed due to lack of appropriate affordable housing and to parents who did not have appropriate affordable housing and the delay of reunifying with their children was present.

In 1993, Congress implemented the Family Preservation and Family Support Act, which were renamed to the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Act (Title IV-B, Subpart 2 of the Social Security Act). This program was created to provide funding directly to states to develop preservation services designed to reduce placement of children into foster care. In 2002, this act was reauthorized.

In 1997, Congress passed the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), which provides a framework for child welfare policy. This act clearly sets out the goals of "safety, permanence and well-being" for children. It implements shortened time frames and making decisions for permanency. Reasonable efforts need to be accomplished to reunite children with parents. Permanency and concurrent

planning for children within the system is consistently evaluated.

Homelessness and Foster Care

Housing issues manifest themselves in different ways and to various degrees. The most serious housing problem is homelessness. The Institute for Children and Poverty (1997) indicated that in 1997 there were approximately 400,000 homeless families in America and over 650,000 children in foster care. This research survey found that 70% of the homeless experienced sexual, physical or emotional abuse as children, that 20% had one or more children in foster care and that 35% had an open case with child protective services for abuse or neglect. In 1999, a follow up study that was conducted after welfare reform was initiated, by the same institute indicated that 77% of families in San Diego County who lost benefits due to welfare reform became homeless.

Culhane, Webb, Grim, Metraux, and Culhane, (2003) conducted a five-year study that concluded that the children of mothers who had been homeless at one time had the greatest risk of child welfare involvement (37%), followed by other low-income residents (9.2%). Children

with mothers who had been homeless at least once and were involved with child welfare had the highest risk of being in out of home care (62%) This research concluded that there is a strong relationship between mothers being homeless and their children being in out of home care. They advised that more research is needed to determine the appropriateness of various interventions including having child welfare agencies vested in the financing, development, and management of transitional and permanent housing programs to reduce abuse and neglect by providing education and monitoring.

Along these lines, Cowal, Shinn, Weitzman, Stojanovic, and Labay (2002) examined the incidence, characteristics, and predictors of separations of children mothers in 543 poor families receiving public assistance. The families were interviewed at the request of a shelter or they were drawn at random from the public assistance caseload. Interviewers collected information for up to six separation episodes, involving either different children or multiple episodes for a particular child. Respondents reported the dates of each separation episode, where the child lived, who made the decision to have the child live apart from the mother and if it was

her decision, and the main reason for the separation. They found that 133 reported being separated from one or more of their children at some point in time. Homeless mothers were more likely to become separated from children than were housed mothers and separated children were more likely to come from homeless families; only 34 came from housed families. No difference was found between groups defined by who had made the decision that led to the separation (about evenly split among the mother herself, child welfare authorities or the court). They concluded that at every level of assessed risk, homeless mothers were more likely than their housed counterparts to lose their children.

Similarly, Bassuk and Weinreb (1997) conducted a study of 220 homeless families and 216 from never homeless female-headed families receiving AFDC to find determinants of behavior of homeless and low-income housed preschool children, and to identify family and environmental determinants of their behavior. They assessed families using a comprehensive interview protocol. They found that homeless preschoolers were significantly more likely to have experienced stressful life events, undergone a care and protection

investigation, and been placed in foster care when compared with low-income preschoolers. They concluded that both homeless and low-income children experience significant adversity in their, with homeless preschool children facing more stress.

Courtney, McMurtry, and Zinn (2004) examined data on families whose experience involved child welfare services to evaluate whether there was a relationship between housing problems and case outcome. This article illustrates the housing difficulties that families face as they are receiving voluntary in home services and court-ordered out of home care. Second, the study demonstrates the relationship between housing problems and likelihood of having children reunifying with their parents. The study concluded that 336 (68%) of the children remained in out of home care after one year of services, whereas 118 (23.9%) were reunified with their parents, 25 (5.1%) were adopted or discharged to legal guardianship, and 15 (3.0%) had exited care for other reasons. Among the caretakers, 77 (26.6%) reported that the target child in their family had been reunified with them within one year of entering care. This study suggests that low-income families with children need

provisions for housing assistance and child welfare agencies need to address the delivery of such services to their recipients.

The Costs of Foster Care

Harbuger and White (2004) indicated that in 2000 there were 547,415 children in out of home care. This study found that 30% of the children in foster care could be reunified with their families if they had safe, affordable housing (Doerre & Mihaly, 1996; Hagedorn, 1995; Thoma, 1998). The results of their research indicated that it costs \$2.76 billion per year to maintain 30% of the children in foster care with supportive services. However, by reunifying children with their parents and providing housing assistance and supportive services, the costs would be \$816 million per year. The savings could amount to more than \$1.94 billion per year.

Reunification Challenges

Ultimately, families should not need to become involved with child protection authorities to obtain housing that allows them to safely care their children. A study conducted by Schlanger-Cohen, Fitzpatrick,

Hulchanski, and Raphael (1995) surveyed family service workers at the Children's Aid Society (CAS) of Metropolitan Toronto. The family service worker selected case files on a random basis using a random numbers table to achieve a sample that would adequately represent the population of children admitted to care with the designated one year-period. The two central questions were "In your opinion, was the family's housing situation one of the factors that resulted in temporary placement of a child/children into care?" and "In your opinion, was there delay of the return home of children from care due to any-related problem?"

They found that in 18.4% of cases the family's housing situation was identified by the family service worker as "one of the factors that resulted in temporary placement of the child into care." They also found that over half of the cases in the entire sample had "No permanent home for the family" as a very important factor in the delay of the return of children to their parents.

They concluded that access to safe and affordable housing will not necessarily prevent a child's admissions to CAS care, but housing support may reduce the number of admissions, stabilize the family's living situation in

ways that promote children's well-being, and reduce housing-related delays in the return of children to their parents.

Wells and Guo (2003) sampled 378 children from 277 families that were involved in child welfare and AFDC. The independent variable was the mother's problems and the dependent variable was the number of days the children were in foster care. The research evaluated different factors in the reunification process with a primary consideration being the loss of AFDC funding. They concluded that "prior to welfare reform in the community studied, consistent receipt of income from welfare is associated with faster rates of reunification, and loss of significant amount of income from welfare, whether it is followed by work or not, is associated with slower rates of reunification.

Summary

Throughout this chapter, it is apparent that there seems to be a connection between the lack of affordable housing, homelessness, and child welfare involvement with families. Consequently, homelessness seems to have affected child protective services case management

throughout the country. With welfare reform's stringent timelines and affordable housing becoming scarce, it seems that continued research is necessary so that services, policy implementation, and current case management practices can be evaluated and revised where necessary.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This was an exploratory research project that used a questionnaire with a wide range of variables including nominal, ordinal, and interval levels of measurement. The research question being analyzed was, "How do Child Protective Service Workers' perception of how housing issues affect their decisions in the removal of children from their parents, and the reunification of children to their parents?"

Study Design

The purpose of this research was to measure how CPS workers perceive that homelessness has affected their case outcomes. The independent variables were perceptions of housing and child welfare involvement, and the dependent variables were housing issues. The effects of housing issues on the decisions that Child Protective Service Workers' were measured by using a questionnaire that included characteristics of housing issues and whether or not they affected their decision to remove children from their parents and reunify children with

their parents. Included in the questionnaire are several types of questions that include general demographic characteristics of workers within the department including employment title, years of service, gender, and age of last birthday (Appendix A).

Sampling

Sampling was conducted within San Bernardino County Child Protective Services. Four hundred and fifty questionnaires were distributed to all San Bernardino County offices and were placed in all CPS workers mailboxes.

A total of one hundred and twenty six questionnaires were returned in which he derived our sample. The questionnaires included a self-addressed envelope for return of the study in order to minimize work disruption.

Data Collection and Instruments

There were no instruments available to accurately capture the Child Protective Service Workers' perception of how housing issues influences the workers decision to remove or reunify children. This instrument was created to depict the variable of housing issues as it relates to the social workers perception in their decision to remove

or reunify children. This instrument was a quantitative self-reporting instrument, which consisted of 26 questions. This instrument was pre-tested by giving it to a few Child Protective Service Workers who were not involved in the study who evaluated the instrument. See Appendix A for a copy of the questionnaire given to the participants of the study.

This instrument had two sections, Removal and Reunification. The instrument consisted of nominal and ordinal levels of measurement and the questions in each section were similar in nature. By keeping the questions in the instrument consistent within the different sections, responses would provide a greater understanding regarding social workers perception of housing issues within the different programs (i.e., Family Maintenance or Family Reunification) of Child Protective Services.

Removal questions (1-10) for removal and asked the workers about how different housing situations influenced their decision in the removal of children. Reunification questions (11-19) asked the workers if the different housing situations influenced their decision in reunifying a child with their parents. There were two questions (Q = 20 & 21) asked to gain an overall view of

the homeless and substandard housing problems currently and within the past six months.

Nominal levels of measurement were applied to the basic demographic quantitative information were collected for social workers, their age, education level, current job title, and how long they worked for the County in their present position. Nominal levels of measurement (no = 0, yes = 1) also applied to Questions 1 and Question 11. For example, question one (a-f) was a nominal level of measurement "How much does the following situations influence your decision in the 'remove' or 'reunify' children?" For each separate situation, the questions were no = 0, yes = 1. These series (a-f) no/yes responses included the following housing situations: homeless shelter, transitional housing, and living in substandard housing, living in motels, inadequate living space, and homeless.

The ordinal levels of measurement were utilized for all of the quantitative data collected in the Likert scale within the two sections of the instruments. The Likert scales used were (Strongly Disagree = 0, Disagree = 1, Agree = 2, Strongly Agree = 3) and (Not at all = 0, A little = 1, A lot = 2, Completely = 3) Due to

the comments made by respondents there were added responses to the data as entered in the computer.

This instrument creation was to provide a general assessment of the variable housing issues and its influence on workers perceptions in the removal and reunification of children. This instrument did not evaluate co existing variables (i.e., substance abuse, mental health) for housing problems or homelessness, it only wanted to evaluate housing. Since this instrument was created, it could have been very easy to ask questions to gain the response wanted. However, in the process of keeping the instrument general, it possibly was too general at points.

The strength of this instrument is that it provided a wide variety of responses and it was a general instrument. However, there seemed to have several weaknesses to this instrument. First, there needs to be additional clarifying in the response levels of the instrument and questions need to be re-evaluated to gain better measurement levels of perception.

Procedures

The data was gathered from Child Protective Service Workers in San Bernardino County. An agency approval letter was obtained from San Bernardino County in order to grant permission to recruit Child Protective Service Workers.

The questionnaires were put in CPS workers' mailboxes. The questionnaires included a self-addressed envelope for return of the study in order to minimize work disruption.

The participants were provided with an informed consent that was attached on top of the questionnaire. Following completion of the questionnaire, participants were provided with a debriefing statement and were thanked for their participation.

Protection of Human Subjects

Protection of Confidentiality and anonymity of human subjects is essential. Anonymity of participants was accomplished by not asking for participants names. Informed Consent was given to participants prior to completing the survey. The informed consent provided a place for a check mark for consent and to protect their

anonymous participation in the study. Participants were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary (Appendix B). This included a statement asking their willingness to participate and a statement of their rights as a participant. Participants had the option to decline or turn in their surveys with others so that no one would know who participated and who did not.

Following the questionnaire a debriefing statement was given to participants (Appendix C).

Data Analysis

The data in this exploratory research were analyzed on several different levels. The survey consisted of 27 questions and had mixed nominal, ordinal, and interval ratio variables.

The focus of this survey was on the analysis of the topic, "CPS workers' perception of how housing affects their decisions to remove children from their parents and reunify children with their parents." Several statistical measures were utilized including frequencies of the variables, bivariate correlation analysis, Chi Square and t-tests. The latter statistical methods determined if

there were relationships between any of the variables that impact one another.

Summary

This was an exploratory research project that evaluated CPS workers' perceptions of how housing issues affect their decisions to remove children from their parents and reunify children with their parents. The creation of this instrument took into account other research. A pre-existing research instrument was not available. In summary, this study's purpose was to gain a greater understanding on how housing issues affect the removal of children from parents and the reunification of children to their parents.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

Included in Chapter Four is a presentation of the study results. The demographic composition of the study is presented. The response frequencies for the Child Welfare Workers questionnaire are presented. This chapter concludes with a summary.

Presentation of the Findings

As previously described, four hundred and fifty surveys were sent out and one hundred and twenty six were returned (35.7%). The respondents were employed by San Bernardino County Department of Family and Youth Services (DYFS) as social service workers (16.26%), social service practitioners (73.17%), supervisors (9.76%), and managers (.81%). Over two-thirds of the respondents were female (79.2%) and 73.17% were social service practitioners, as shown in Figure 1.

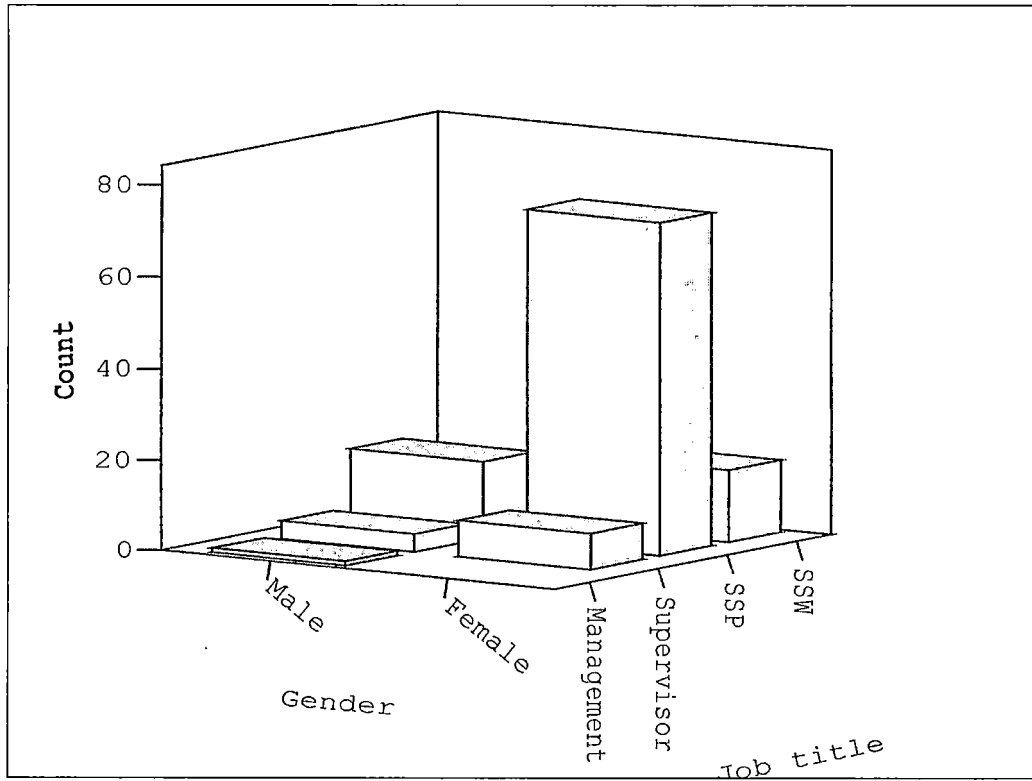


Figure 1. Gender and Job Title

The age of respondents ranged from 25 to 69 years (mean = 44.13, s.d. = 10.793), with over 50% of the sample being 40 years of age or older as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Age Group

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
20-29	18	14.3	14.3	14.3
30-39	23	18.3	18.3	32.5
40-49	39	31.0	31.0	63.5
50-59	30	23.8	23.8	87.3
60-69	11	8.7	8.7	96.0
No Response	5	4.0	4.0	100.0
Total	126	100.0	100.0	

The respondent's length of service varied from less than a year to over 20 years (mean = 6.59, s.d. = 5.572). The questionnaire asked for their length of service in their current position; however, many respondents indicated their total length of service with the agency, which may have been different from their length of service in their current position.

Table 2 displays the length of service in groupings of about four year intervals. The reason for the different intervals is that the length of time within periods would indicate varied levels of experience and benefits (i.e., Title IVE payback, probationary periods, and retirement incentives). This is also useful in understanding the experience of the worker and their perceptions of their decisions. Thirty two percent (32%) were within their IV-E payback period or probationary period. The majority of respondents (59%) were in the middle of their career, while over 14% of the respondents were approaching retirement with more than fifteen years of experience.

Table 2. Length of Service

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 0-3 years	41	32.5	32.5	32.5
4-6 years	35	27.8	27.8	60.3
7-10 years	24	19.0	19.0	79.4
11-15 years	14	11.1	11.1	90.5
16-20 years	8	6.3	6.3	96.8
more than 21 years	2	1.6	1.6	98.4
No response	2	1.6	1.6	100.0
Total	126	100.0	100.0	

Figure 2 displays the length of service of workers and the workers' age in ten-year intervals. Length of service and age indicate that there is a concentration of workers with between three and ten years of service and in the age group between the thirty's and forty's.

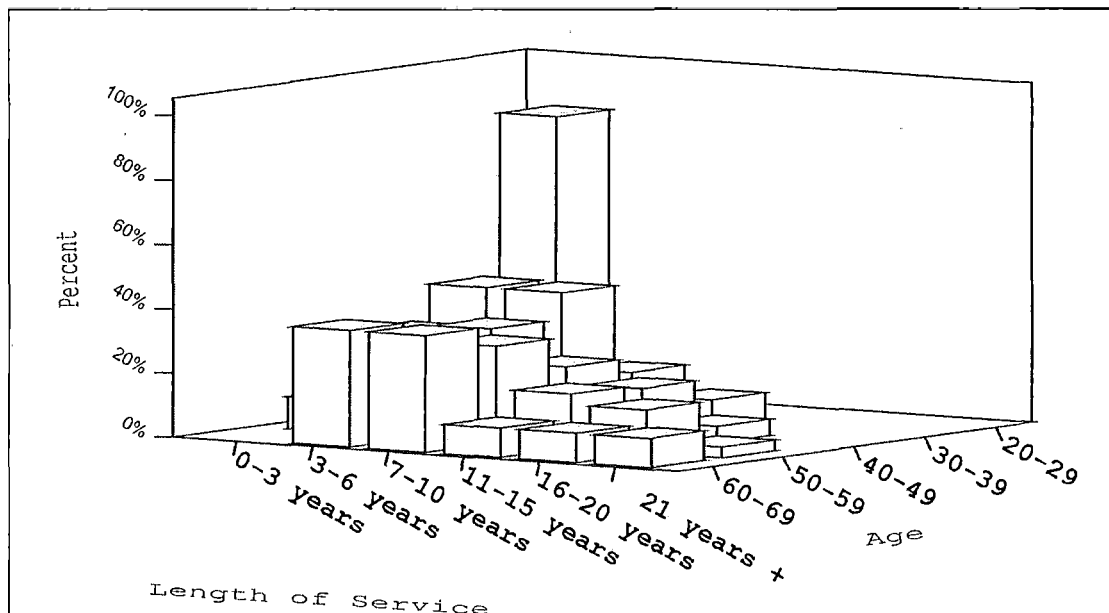


Figure 2. Length of Service and Age

Table 3 indicates that the majority of respondents (68%) had a master's degree.

Table 3. Highest Degree Obtained

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Bachelors	34	27.0	27.6	27.6
Masters	62	49.2	50.4	78.0
MSW	23	18.3	18.7	96.7
Doctorate	4	3.2	3.3	100.0
Total	123	97.6	100.0	
Missing	3	2.4		
Total	126	100.0		

The respondents were asked two questions regarding their caseload to gain an overview of housing problems they encounter (i.e., "Within the past six months, what percentage of clients on your caseload had inappropriate

housing?" and "Currently, what percentage of your caseload is homeless due to housing problems?") as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 shows that half of the respondents (51%) reported that their caseload within the past six months contained clients who had inappropriate housing. Most respondents (90.68%) indicated that their current caseload contained 25% or fewer clients who were homeless because of housing problems.

Table 4. Caseload Percentage of Inappropriate Housing and Homeless due to Housing Problems

	0-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-100%
Within the past six months, what percentage of clients on your caseload had inappropriate housing?	46.22%	28.57%	21.85%	3.36%
Currently, what percentage of your caseload is homeless due to housing problems?	90.68%	5.93%	1.69%	1.69%

Table 5 displays the bivariate correlations that were significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed) among the questions "Would you remove a child from their parents if they lived in the following locations: homeless shelter, transitional housing, living in substandard housing,

living in motels, inadequate living space for number of people, and homeless?" The respondents indicated that those housing locations would not be factors in the removal of children from their parents. Table 5 indicates consistency in the answers. In these question (1 a-f), housing issues did not affect the workers' decision to remove.

Table 5. Bivariate Correlations Removal Question 1a-f

	Shelter	Transitional	Substandard	Motels	Living Space
Transitional Housing	.907**				
substandard housing	.279**	.330**			
Living in Motels	.803**	.888**	.372**		
living Space	.736**	.666**	.417**	.717**	
Homeless	.362**	.328**	.430**	.364**	.466**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 6 shows that there is a significant correlation ($r = .551$, $p = .001$) between question 2, "How much does the lack of appropriate housing influence your decision to remove children from their parents," and

question 3, "How important is the need for appropriate housing in your decision to remove children."

Table 6. Bivariate Correlations Removal Questions 2 and 3

	How much does the lack of appropriate housing influence your decision to remove children from their parents
How important is the need for appropriate housing in your decision in the removal of children?	.551**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Figure 3 indicates that over a quarter of respondents (26.33) would remove children for being homeless.

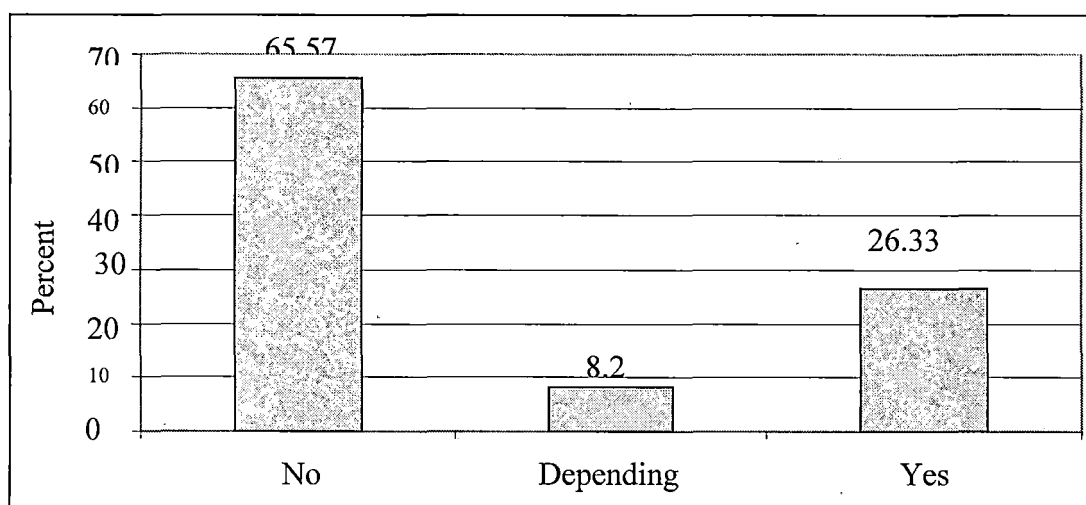


Figure 3. Being Homeless

Figure 4 indicates that a quarter of respondents (23.39%) would remove children from parents if they lived in substandard housing.

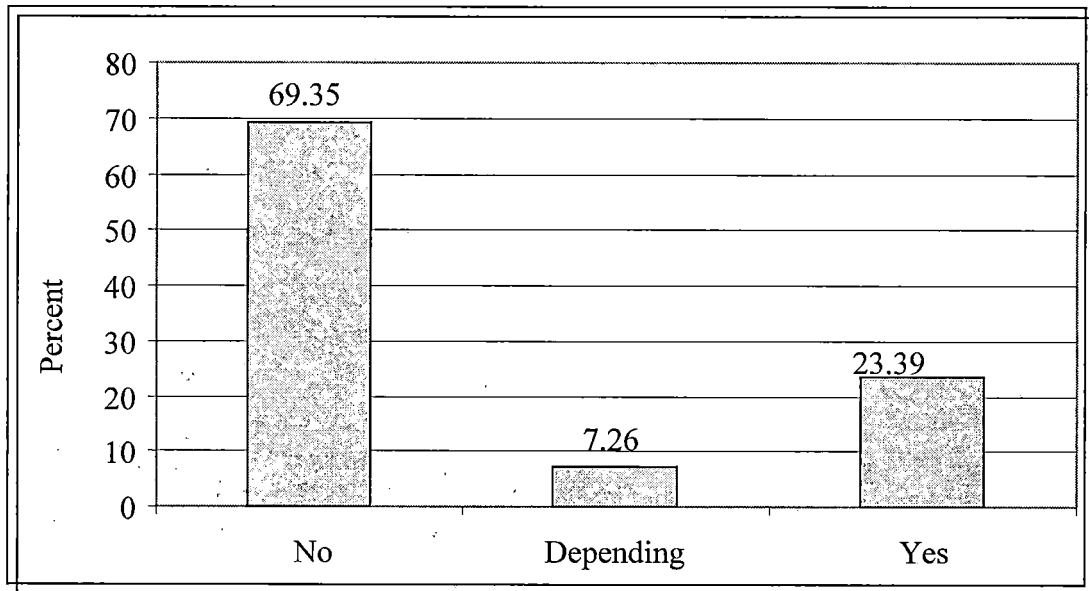


Figure 4. Substandard Housing

The frequencies for question two, "How much does the lack of appropriate housing influence your decision to remove children from their parents?" are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Frequencies for Question 2

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not at All	26	20.6	21.0	21.0
Somewhat	88	69.8	71.0	91.9
A lot	9	7.1	7.3	99.2
Completely	1	.8	.8	100.0
Total	124	98.4	100.0	
Missing	2	1.6		
Total	126	100.0		

Since there were minimal responses for the "A lot" and "Completely" categories, these responses were merged into "A great deal." "Somewhat" was renamed "to some extent" and the response "not at all" remained the same. Figure 5 below, provides a display of the collapsed responses.

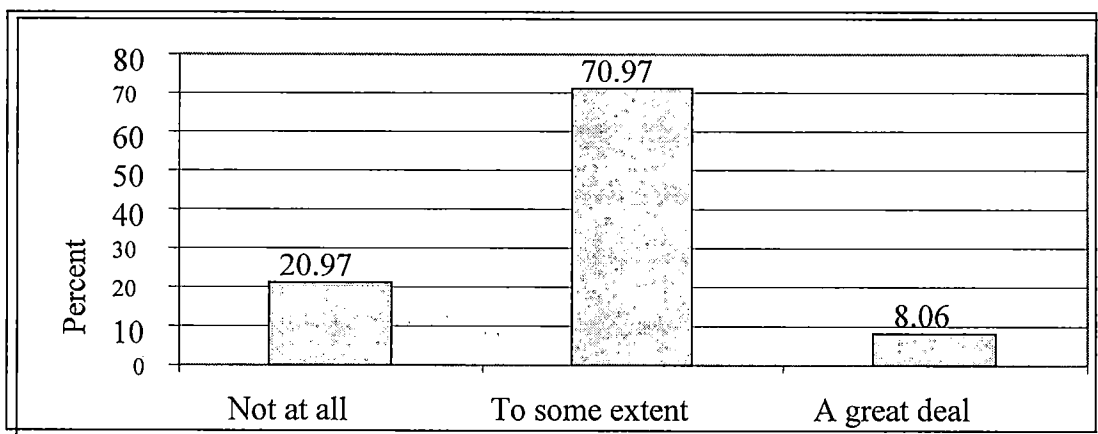


Figure 5. Transformed Variable for Question 2

Figure six shows responses to the question "How important is the need for appropriate housing in your decision in the removal of children?" About three quarters of the respondents indicated that appropriate housing influenced their decision to remove children somewhat or more. Less than a quarter of respondents indicated that appropriate housing was not important in their decision to remove children.

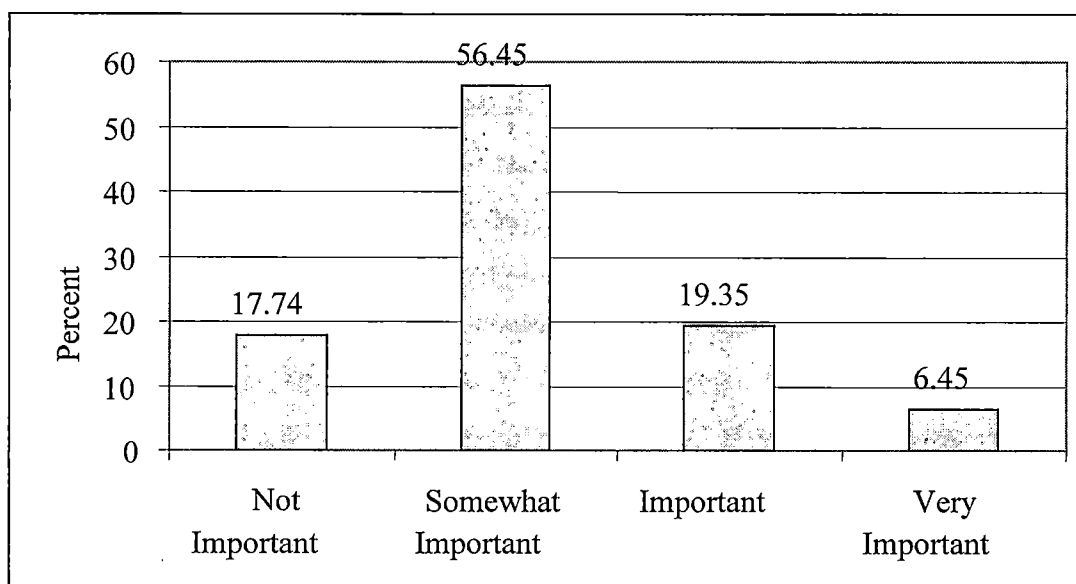


Figure 6. Question 3

Figure 7 shows that among respondents who answered question 4 "If a family were living in a homeless shelter where there were dorm arrangements, much would this affect your decision to remove?" Over half reported that

dorm arrangements would not affect their decision to remove children.

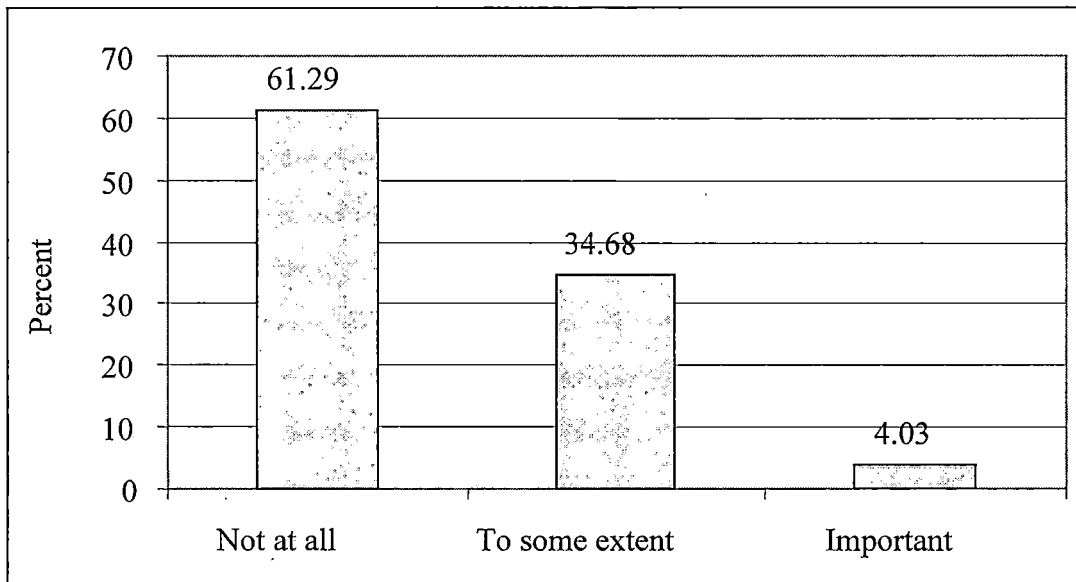


Figure 7. Transformed Variable Question 4

The frequencies for question six, "How much do housing problems influence your decision to remove children from their parents?" are shown in Table 10.

Table 8. Frequencies Question 6

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not at All	26	20.6	20.6	20.6
Depending	1	.8	.8	21.4
Sometimes	96	76.2	76.2	97.6
A lot	2	1.6	1.6	99.2
Completely	1	.8	.8	100.0
Total	126	100.0	100.0	

Reunification Results

Table 9 displays bivariate correlations for the questions "Would you reunify a child with their parents in the following locations: homeless shelter, transitional housing, living in substandard housing, living in motels, inadequate living space for the number of people in the home, or homeless?" The significant relationships between variables indicates that consistent factors are used to determine whether to reunify children with their parents. Table 11 describes the relationship between variables with significant correlations at the 0.01 level.

Table 9. Correlations Reunification Question 11a-f

	Shelter	Transition	Substandard Housing	Motels	Living Space
Transition	.432**				
Substandard Housing	.215*	.141			
Motels	.434**	.280**	.317**		
Living Space	.145	.267**	.149	.266**	
Homeless	.237**	.027	.027	.368**	.466**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Figure 8 indicates that most respondents who had less than six years of experience reported that housing influenced their decision to reunify "Completely or Sometimes."

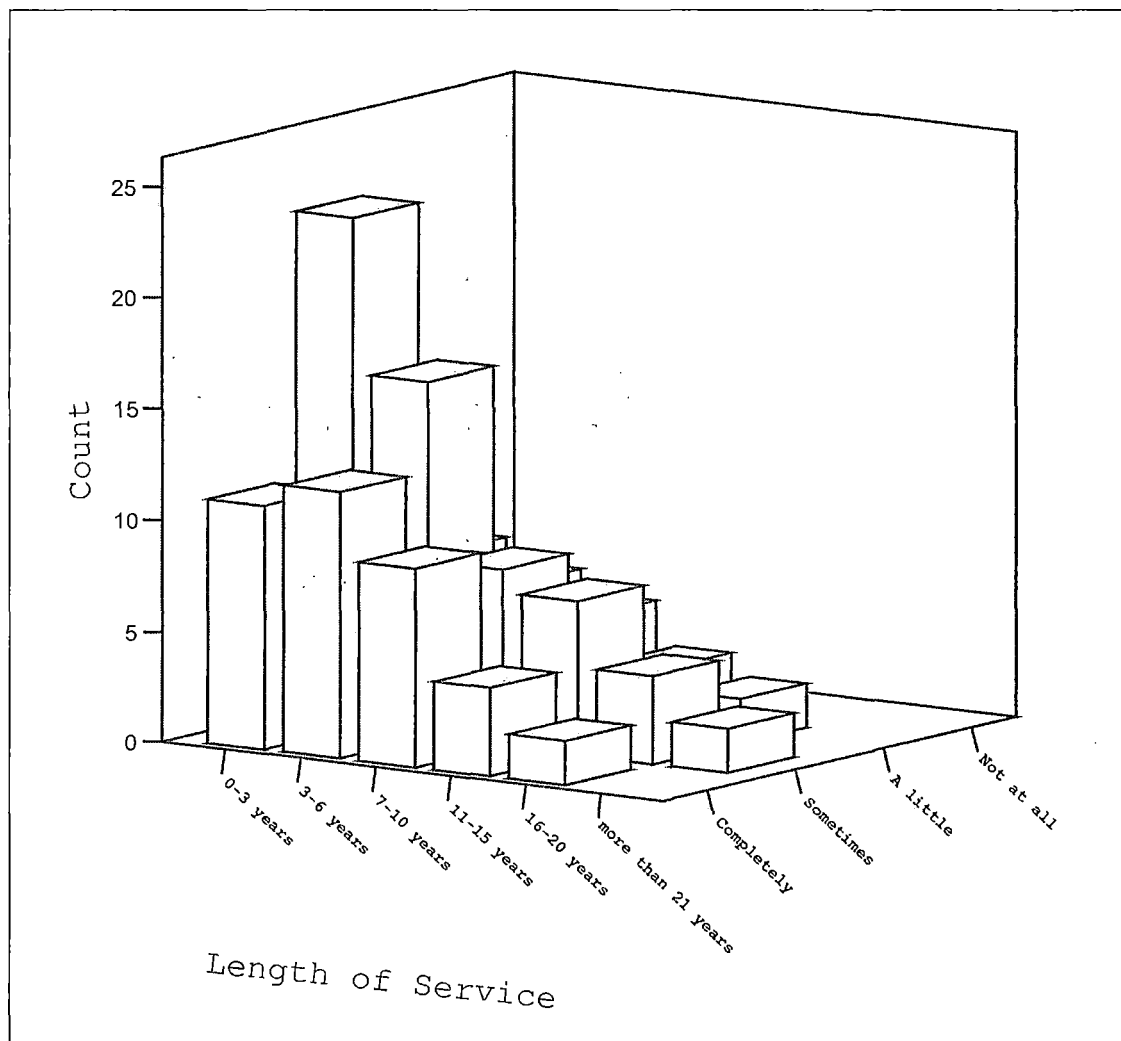


Figure 8. Length of Service and Question 12

Table 10 describes the significant relationships ($P < 0.001$) among the variables delay in reunification

because of the lack of appropriate or substandard housing, does substandard housing affect your decision in reunifying children, and are housing issues important to reunification.

Table 10. Bivariate Correlations: Reunification

	Delay	Substandard housing
Does substandard housing affect your decision	.284*	
Housing problems important	.394*	.544*

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Summary

Chapter Four reviewed the data extracted from the questionnaire. This included demographic information, along with the frequencies, bivariate analysis, and figures obtained from the questionnaire for Child Welfare Workers. The respondents stated that housing does have some impact in their decisions to remove or reunify children. Further, the analysis of the questionnaire included figures to show the relationships among variables.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

Included in Chapter Five is a presentation of the conclusions from the data analysis in Chapter Four. This discussion provides recommendations based on the presented data. It also discusses the limitations and possible ways of correcting the limitations in future research. This section also discusses further research needed to gain a clearer picture of how housing affects child welfare worker's perceptions in their decision-making. The chapter concludes with a summary

Discussion

This study was designed to gather the perceptions of Child Protective Service Workers' on how housing affects their decisions to remove children from their parents or reunify children with their parents. The findings presented varied results. First, the results for removal and reunification varied considerably. The respondents reported that housing affected their decision to reunify children with their parents more than it did to remove children from their parents. Second, Child Protective

Service Workers who had lower educational levels reported that housing was more important than did those with higher educational levels. Third, families who were homeless or living in substandard housing had a greater risk of having their children removed or not reunified.

Over fifty percent of respondents indicated that, within the past six months, their caseload had contained 26% or more clients who had inappropriate housing. About a quarter of the respondents had half to three quarters of their caseload with inappropriate housing. These seem to be substantially high percentages when evaluating the next question, "Currently, what percentage of your caseload is homeless due to housing problems?" The majority of respondents indicated that less than a quarter of their caseload was homeless due to housing problems and less than ten percent had clients homeless due to housing problems.

This inspires further evaluation of these percentages and the lack of consistency between the two; there could be several reasons for this. First, a child could be removed from parents due to a variable that was not evaluated. Second, the cases may have been closed due to lack of resources to help. Third, homelessness is not

as great an issue as is inappropriate housing. This leads to further questions as to when housing becomes an important issue in child protection assessments and programs.

As to the removal of children, this study indicated that housing was not the sole reason for removal because removal and its assessment is complex evaluates several risk and safety measurements. Respondents made statements on the questionnaire such as, "homelessness in itself is not reason for removal. Removal is dependent on several issues like substance abuse, neglect, abuse, etc." Respondents were more cautious about answering blanket questions regarding removal than with reunification. This could have been for several reasons including policy, procedures, and laws that govern removal.

However, there were removal findings that did relate to housing. In their assessments on removal , social workers take into consideration several variables besides housing. It seemed that the respondents were having a difficult time answering the questions at face value because they wanted more information. The respondents made comments on the questionnaire such as, "Homelessness in itself does not deem removal and they help fix

inappropriate housing problems. What other things are going on with the family (i.e., substance abuse, mental health)." Even with these questions, over sixty percent of respondents indicated that housing would not influence their decisions in removal, whereas, a quarter of respondents indicated that housing does influence their decision to remove children. In other words, about a quarter of respondents indicated that they would remove children due to housing problems. Consequently, this increases the risk of removal.

Several variables had a relationship with the risk of removal. First, workers who have less than six years of experience consider housing in the removal assessment more than those who have more experience. Second, the respondents that were younger took housing into consideration more than those that were older. Third, workers indicated that different housing facilities would not have an affect on their decision to removal. However, for the questions that used a Likert scale to assess levels of influence, the respondents indicated that inappropriate housing, being homeless, and housing were somewhat important to very important in their decision to remove.

Respondents indicated that housing issues were more prominent in their assessments to reunify children than in the removal process. This could be due to policy, state law, or federal guidelines. In the family reunification guidelines, a parent needs to be able to provide safe, appropriate, and stable housing to meet the needs of their family before a worker can reunify the children with their parents.

There were consistencies among responses as to housing issues. The data indicated that those respondents with less than ten years experience reported that housing influences their decision to reunify children. The research also indicated that there were significant relationships between delay in reunification, substandard housing, and the importance of housing problems in reunifying children with their parents.

This leads to the need for further evaluation and questions such as whether housing problems reduce a family's chance of regaining custody of their children once removed. Reunification decisions are not made solely on the basis of housing. Workers assess parent and child functioning, substance abuse, or environmental factors

that need to be controlled in making the decision to remove or reunify children.

This study's findings support the literature in that housing related problems influence Child Protective Service Workers' decisions in the process of reunifying children with their parents. This implies that parents may have corrected their individual level of functioning but are still struggling with the concrete need for suitable housing. Parents may have a much more difficult time trying to secure housing without their children. Regardless, reunification of children in foster care with their biological parents is considered a more favorable disposition than for children to remain in placement.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. The instrument had several problems, which created difficulty in the analysis of the data. First, the Likert scales were not consistent in the survey (i.e., low to high; high to low). Second, the questions asked were minimally descriptive and defined which affected the respondents' ability to gain a clear picture of what the goal of the question was. This could have been resolved by asking

additional questions to clarify the definition of housing, substandard housing, and appropriate housing. Third, other variables that may have had an important role in the removal or reunification of children were not taken into account. This could provide clarity to the importance of housing issues because the respondents wanted to consider those variables, which ultimately affected the results of the survey when they wrote in their own additional variables (i.e., depending).

Another limitation of this study was that there were no questions regarding resources in the community for housing assistance, shelters, or vouchers. Further, there were no questions regarding observed trends by the workers (in your time working with the county have housing problems increased, remained the same, decreased). This type of question would have been useful since there has been an increase in population, which has had an impact on escalating housing costs.

This survey might have excluded participants with learning disabilities or those who spoke another language. The survey did not ask about primary language. It also did not ask about ethnicity. This study only surveyed Child Protective Service Workers in one county.

Therefore, generalizations from this study are limited to areas with demographics that are similar to San Bernardino County.

While this study provided some interesting findings and highlights areas for further study, it is exploratory in nature and was not designed to be definitive in the discussion of correlations between housing and the removal and reunification of children from their parents.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

The findings highlight the need to increase awareness of and sensitivity to families with housing issues. This research was a beginning in evaluating housing as a key factor in the decision to remove or reunify children with their parents.

Implications for the social work profession include focusing on concrete needs of the family such as housing, rather than only on family functioning. It is imperative that social workers are aware of the various forms of housing assistance that might be available to their clients. Child Protective Service Workers should advocate for and develop partnerships with other institutions, such as public welfare departments and housing

authorities. These kinds of partnerships are essential to ensure that families have priority access to housing assistance if it means families will continue to be together and children will be safe.

Since this area of research has not been explored in detail, it would be beneficial if future research focused on controlling for other variables that are common characteristics of families that come to the attention of Child Protection authorities in determining how housing as a factor affects the decisions made in the removal or reunification of children. Other factors to be explored in the decision making process would be ethnicity of families, age of the children, and income levels that come into contact with the department. This would help to focus the target population by reaching out to those who are most at risk.

Conclusions

Conclusions extracted from the project are as follows. It is apparent that housing is a factor in the decisions made by Child Protective Service workers to reunify children with parents. Even though housing was the initial factor in the worker's decision to remove,

this research did provide information about the workers assessment process and how policy, procedure, and laws that govern their field influence them. Perhaps Child Welfare Workers are more focused on parental functioning and less attentive to concrete needs such as housing because of the principles guiding agency practice and the workers' education and training. Alternatively, workers may simply not be in a position to provide assistance with housing due to a lack of resources. If this is true, they may tend to ignore housing as a problem rather than deal with the reality that they cannot help their clients without this important need being met.

Additionally, families should not have to become involved with Child Protective services to obtain housing, but the goal of reunifying children in foster care with their families of origin is a priority. It is state law that reasonable efforts be made to prevent the removal of children from their families. The goal is to return children home as soon as possible.

Furthermore, reunification efforts are designed to stabilize families so that recidivism of children growing up in foster care is decreased. However, once a child is removed, the child experiences instability, repeated

losses, and multiple placement changes. On a global level, it is far more expensive to keep a child in foster placement than it is to maintain the child in the family by providing suitable housing. This research did indicate that substandard housing and homelessness in social workers caseloads is about 25%, which calls the attention of child welfare authorities to evaluate housing related issues and to provide housing programs. Consequently, this may increase the desired outcomes of the child welfare system. It could potentially decrease recidivism and increase stability for families who are struggling with maintaining the most basic need, shelter.

APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE

Survey Questionnaire for Child Welfare Workers

In this section, we would like to ask you a few questions about how the issue of housing would influence your decision to remove a child from or reunify with parents. There is no right or wrong answers. Please indicate your answers as accurately as possible.

For the purposes of this study, inappropriate housing is defined as not enough bedroom space, beds, and living space. Substandard housing is defined by some risk like no refrigerator, some minor structure problems, dirty and bad carpeting.

Child(ren) removed from parents:

1. Would you remove a child from their parents if they lived in the following locations? (Please check yes or no)

a.	Homeless Shelter	Yes	No
b.	Transitional Housing	Yes	No
c.	Living in substandard housing	Yes	No
d.	Living in motels	Yes	No
e.	Inadequate living space for number of people in home	Yes	No
f.	Homeless	Yes	No

2. How much does the lack of appropriate housing influence your decision to remove children from their parents?

- a. Not at all
- b. Somewhat
- c. A lot
- d. Completely

3. How important is the need for appropriate housing in your decision in the removal of children?

- a. *Not at all*
- b. *Somewhat*
- c. *Important*
- d. *Completely*

4. If a family were living in a shelter where there was dorm type sleeping arrangement for family members, how much would this effect your decision to remove children from their parents?

- a. *Not at all*
- b. *Somewhat*
- c. *Important*
- d. *Completely*

5. If a family was recently evicted from their apartment for non-payment and they were living with three other families in a small three bedroom where each family had their own room, how would this scenario effect your decision to remove children?

- a. *Not at all*
- b. *Somewhat*
- c. *A lot*
- d. *Completely*

6. How much do housing problems influence your decision to remove children from their parents?

- a. *Not at all*
- b. *Somewhat*
- c. *A lot*
- d. *Completely*

7. I would remove a child from their parents if the family was homeless.

- a. *Strongly Agree*
- b. *Agree*
- c. *Disagree*
- d. *Strongly Disagree*

8. Substandard housing affected my decision in the removal of children from their parents?

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly Disagree

9. Housing problems are an important factor in the removal of children from their parents.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Sometimes
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

10. Have children been removed from their parents because of the lack of appropriate housing?

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Sometimes
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Reunify children with parents:

11. Would you reunify a child to their parents if the family lived in the following locations?

(Please check yes or no)

a.	Shelter	Yes	No
b.	Transitional Housing	Yes	No
c.	Living in substandard Housing	Yes	No
d.	Inadequate living space for number of people in home	Yes	No
e.	Living in motels	Yes	No
f.	Homeless	Yes	No

12. How much does the lack of appropriate housing influence your decision to return children to their parents?

- a. Not at all
- b. A little
- c. Sometimes
- d. Completely

13. If the parents were living in a homeless shelter where there were dorm type sleeping arrangements for family members, how *much* would this effect your decision to return children to their parents?

- a. Low
- b. Medium
- c. High
- d. Extremely High

14. If a family was recently evicted from their apartment for non-payment and they were living with three other families in a small three bedroom where each family had their own room, how would this scenario effect your decision to reunify children?

- a. Not at all
- b. a little
- c. a lot
- d. completely

15. How *much* do housing problems influence your decision in the reunification of children with their parents?

- a. Not at all
- b. a little
- c. a lot
- d. completely

16. Housing issues are an important issue in reunification of children to parents?

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly Disagree

17. Has there been a delay in reunification because of the lack of appropriate or substandard housing?

- a. Not at all
- b. A little
- c. Sometimes
- d. All the time

18. Does substandard housing affect your decision in reunifying children with their parents?

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly Disagree

19. Housing problems are an important factor in the reunification of children with their parents.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Sometimes
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

20. In the past 6 months, what percentage of clients in your caseload had inappropriate housing?

- a. 0% to 25%
- b. 26% to 50%
- c. 51% to 75%
- d. 76% to 100%

21. Currently, what percentage of your caseload is homeless because of housing problems?

- a. 0% to 25%
- b. 26% to 50%
- c. 51% to 75%
- d. 76% to 100%

Demographics

22. What is your current job title? _____

23. How long have you worked in this position? _____

24. Gender: Male _____ Female _____

25. How old were you on your last birthday? _____

27. What is the highest Degree that you obtained?

- a. Associate of Arts
- b. Bachelor of Arts
- c. Master of Arts
- d. Master of Science
- e. Doctorate

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to gather Child Protective Service Workers' perception of how homelessness affects case outcomes. This study is conducted by Amanda Vasquez and Dorothy Mokate Wilson under the supervision of Dr. McCaslin at California State University San Bernardino's Master of Social Work Department. This study has been approved by the Department of Social Work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino.

In this study, you will be asked to respond to several questions regarding homelessness within your caseload. This survey consists of 27 questions and should take about ten to 15 minutes to complete. All your responses will be held in the strictest of confidence by the researchers. Your name will not be asked for with your responses. All data will be reported in group form only. You may receive the results of this study after September 2006, at the Department of Children's Services located at 150 South Lena Road, San Bernardino, California, 92415.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free not to answer any questions and withdraw at any time during this study without penalty. When you have completed the questionnaire, you will receive a debriefing statement describing the study in more detail. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact Professor Rosemary McCaslin at (909) 537-5507.

By placing a check mark in the box below, I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and that I understand, that the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely consent to participate. I also acknowledge that I am at least 18 years of age.

Place a check mark [] Today's date _____

APPENDIX C
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

STUDY OF CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICE WORKERS' PERCEPTION OF
HOW HOUSING ISSUES AFFECT THEIR DECISIONS

Debriefing Statement

The study you have just completed for Amanda Vasquez and Dorothy Mokate-Wilson was designed to investigate Child Protective Service (CPS) workers' perception of how housing issues affect their decisions in the removal of children from their parents and the reunification of children with their parents. Second, this study evaluated whether housing may have become a factor in the removal of children or the reunification of children.

Thank you for your participation and for not discussing the contents of this questionnaire with other coworkers. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Professor Rosemary McCaslin at California State University San Bernardino (909) 537-5507. If you would like to obtain a copy of the results, you may do so from the Department of Children's Services San Bernardino.

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ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

This was a two-person project where authors collaborated throughout. However, for each phase of the project, certain authors took primary responsibility. These responsibilities were assigned in the manner listed below.

1. Data Collection:

Team Effort: Amanda Vasquez & Dorothy Mokate Wilson

2. Data Entry and Analysis:

Team Effort: Amanda Vasquez & Dorothy Mokate Wilson

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:

- a. Introduction and Literature

Team Effort: Amanda Vasquez &
Dorothy Mokate Wilson

- b. Methods

Team Effort: Amanda Vasquez &
Dorothy Mokate Wilson

- c. Results

Team Effort: Amanda Vasquez &
Dorothy Mokate Wilson

- d. Discussion

Team Effort: Amanda Vasquez &
Dorothy Mokate Wilson